

Protecting Civilians from Harm: How Can Armed Actors Be Made to Comply with Rules?

A Project Funded by UK Research & Innovation and the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office

RATIONALE & OBJECTIVES

This research project investigates efforts to influence the behavior of armed actors toward civilians in war zones. Militaries and non-state armed groups in many of today's conflicts frequently and at times systematically violate the rights of civilians guaranteed under International Humanitarian Law, Human Rights Law and national law. A range of very different actors – from humanitarian, human rights and security organizations to religious authorities and local communities – try to limit such violations by encouraging armed actors to exercise restraint and comply with relevant rules and norms (*preventive protection*).

Focusing on Iraq, the research project aims to understand how well these activities have been planned and how effective they are perceived to be. In doing so, the project seeks to identify lessons learned that can help make similar initiatives more effective in the future.

APPROACH & RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The project will contrast the perspectives of entities trying to influence armed actors with those of the armed actors themselves. Working with these entities, the research team will dissect the logic on which interventions encouraging armed actors to exercise restraint are based. In addition, we will explore what armed actors themselves have to say about the factors that influence them in their behavior toward civilians. By combining these two perspectives and triangulating them with the perceptions of affected communities, the project seeks to understand the effectiveness of different interventions.

Our research will be guided by three central research questions:

- 1 Theories of change:** What is the logic underlying different types of interventions that encourage armed actors to exercise restraint? What goals do these interventions pursue? What activities are conducted to reach these goals? And what assumptions are these activities based on?
- 2 Factors influencing the behavior of armed actors:** What are key factors that influence the behavior of fighters according to communities and armed actors themselves? Do the perceptions of soldiers differ from those of non-state fighters? Do perceptions differ between men and women?
- 3 Perceived effectiveness:** How do protection organizations, armed actors and communities view the effectiveness of different preventive protection activities that have taken place in Iraq since 2014?

RESEARCH METHODS

We will draw on the existing **literature, documents** provided by protection actors as well as **consultations** with practitioners to determine the logic that underpins their work and to develop new theories of change. In parallel, we will engage with armed actors and conflict-affected communities in Iraq to gauge their **perceptions** of both armed actor behavior and preventive protection activities. Interim research results will be cross-checked with protection organizations on a regular basis to ensure relevance and to jointly develop them further. The final research results will be **widely disseminated** to protection actors and other stakeholders, particularly in Iraq.

TIMELINE & PROJECT SET-UP

The project will run **until July 2022** and is jointly implemented by several organizations:

The **Global Public Policy Institute (GPPi)** is an independent, non-profit think tank with extensive knowledge of and experience working on humanitarian, peacebuilding and military systems. GPPi has also done prior research on the motivations of armed actors in Iraq and Afghanistan, and has regional expertise on the Middle East.

The **Institute of Regional and International Studies (IRIS)** at the American University of Iraq Sulaimani is an independent research center. It will lead the data collection with armed actors and conflict-affected communities in Iraq. Previous IRIS projects have involved interviews and focus groups with security forces, civilians and civil society actors in multiple provinces of Iraq.

As project partners, the Norwegian Refugee Council and Geneva Call will ensure that its focus and approach are relevant to practitioners.

The **Norwegian Refugee Council** carries out humanitarian assistance and protection activities in more than 30 countries and co-leads protection clusters in 9 countries.

Geneva Call has engaged with more than 150 non-state armed groups worldwide to promote respect for humanitarian norms enhancing the protection of civilians.

POTENTIAL USE OF RESEARCH RESULTS

We foresee protection actors and other stakeholders employing the research results in several ways:

- They can use insights on the relevance and perceived effectiveness of protection activities to **revise or fine-tune their protection strategies and programs** in Iraq and elsewhere.
 - They can either directly **apply the proposed theories of change** in their own work or use them as a basis to **develop their own theories of change**.
 - They can employ the theories of change and analysis of armed actors during **capacity-building activities** for protection actors or to **inform decisions** about whether to fund certain protection activities.
 - They can use the research methodology to **investigate the behavior of armed actors** in other contexts.
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HOW TO GET INVOLVED

WHAT & HOW?

WHEN?

Let us know what part of the research you are most interested in.

Nov/Dec 2020

Tell us what your organization does to influence armed actors.

Nov/Dec 2020

Let us know about other related research projects.

From Nov 2020

Discuss the logic of your protection work with us and work with us to develop or refine theories of change.

Mainly in 2021

Participate (or encourage your colleagues to participate) in interviews.

In 2021

Read (and potentially comment on) our reports.

Late 2021/early 2022

Request a briefing on the results.

From late 2021

Participate in our results workshops.

Early 2022

HOW TO GET IN TOUCH WITH US

To get involved or for any other question, please contact:

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PROJECT PARTNERS



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Institute of Regional & International Studies



To learn more about the project, please visit: www.gppi.net/poc-iraq